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MEPHISTOPHELES.

BY CAROLINE ELIOT LACKLAND.

Bayard Taylor says, with regard to his translation of Faust, that his work grew in clearness as he drew away from the cloudy atmosphere of interpreters, and that the study of commentators led him back to find that the author of Faust is his own best commentator!

As all religious creeds may be predicated upon the Scriptures, from the dogmas of the Church of Rome to the elaborated mysticism of Swedenborg, or the carnal teaching of Brigham Young, so is it also with this (as Starr King calls it) "bible of literature," Faust. From its depths and resources men have drawn inspiration or despair, purity or immorality. Yet Goethe simply placed his own truth there, and left others to discover this by the light they themselves cast upon it; it mattered not to him who became the prey of his devil of doubt or denial, so he himself got rid of him! Mephistopheles was not Goethe's truth-teller, but a bringer out of the truth. The exhaustive form of the great Author's showing forth of his idea required symbols to convey his highest divinations, which were often but the outward sign of their spiritual grace. Goethe, Faust, and Mephistopheles can never be thought singly; to name one is to indicate the others. Thus, given any note in the musical scale as Tonic, the chord resolves itself through mediant and dominant, the harmonious three in one, uttered, divided, and reunited in the first all-containing tone. The character of Mephistopheles has been called an exhausted subject, but those who thus assert only prove themselves to be the subjects exhausted! the theme is too vast even yet to have been adequately grappled with; it is the giant that escaped, in hugely outlined form, from the soul struggles of Goethe, and as in the Arabian tale the Afrite emerged from limited space and took tremendous shape, so arose the demon companion of Faust before the astonished eyes of men. Another, as mighty in intellectual strength as he who set the monster free, must arise to reduce to appreciable limits the power evoked by Goethe; and he must take to the sub-

ject sufficient light and thought fitly to reveal to himself the manifold bearings of that wondrous tragedy of which Bayard Taylor sings to Goethe :

“ Und Deine Jünger sehn in Dir, verwundert,
Verkörpert schon, das werdende Jahrhundert.”

For the expression of Mephistopheles, Goethe reached from oldest Bible lore to Gospel history—from patient Job to agonizing Paul. From his own complex nature, from Herder's elevating or depressing influence, and from the cold, dissecting criticisms of Merck, he gleaned materials that should incorporate his *Liebling-Teufel*, aiming through this creation to escape himself from the body of that death which imprisoned him. Far back into the cold depths of Iceland he penetrated, bidding the giants of the Norse Mythology to do him service. From the fermentations of the philosophical agitations of his time he gathered what should subserve his purpose. Forward, towards the far-off indications of scientific discovery, he turned his keen prophetic thought, and from the travail of his restless brain and life experience grew Faust and Mephistopheles. Who and what is Mephistopheles? He is “not light loving,” he is the spirit of negation, of doubt, of scepticism, of destruction; “all is not known to him, but much”—he is the principle of the understanding—

“ Part of that power not understood
Which always wills the bad, and works the good.”

He is the troublous law that worketh in the members of the Saint :

“ The whirlpool that, swirling to get above,
Is always shoved, imagining to shove ! ”

As universal spirit of finite nature, he first controls, then serves Faust. Like unpalatable yeast, his activity must leaven the inert mass into the wholesome bread of life. He is the impotent instrument that men call “Nature” in things material, “Evil” in things spiritual. He is the offence that must needs come; but to man is the woe if he is admitted into life as ruling force. Men once saw in Goethe's “Prologue in Heaven” only a daring blasphemy; now they recognize the broad, free stroke of the artist, who paints upon a huge canvas colossal outlines of some

masterful conception ; here the delineation presents the grandest theme, there the most lovely ! Again the grotesque and horrible obtain, but, in the final accomplishment of the whole, strength and harmony prevail. In this scene the words of the Lord are :

“ Man’s active nature flagging,
Seeks too soon the level—
Unqualified repose he learns to crave—
Whence willingly the comrade him I gave,
Who works, excites, and must create, as Devil.”

In the divine announcement “ I gave,” we hold the solution of the problem. Nature and evil seem active, and are wholly passive. They are finite, do not know themselves, are not self-determined, and, having served the divine purpose to carry on the divine plan, they *must* fall off, are therefore finite. Mephistopheles is too absurdly impotent to excite divine hatred ; he is an irresponsible agent, without will. Like powerful, pent-up, controlled steam, he forces the machinery of life, itself coerced and limited. And herein consists his awful comicality—his futile struggles against the “ something of this clumsy world ” who forces “ nothing ” to its self-destruction, negates negation, and to whom the wrath of man and death of worlds are “ infant frowns and bubbles bursted ! ” Just here the Devil must have his due, and Mephistopheles may teach a lesson, though unwittingly. In the “ Prologue in Heaven ” he finds himself in highest company ; he appreciates the fact, and is both elated and uncomfortable as he realizes the situation ; but after his departure he is never known to make capital (so to speak) of having appeared at court ; neither does he betray inferiority or weakness by unduly boasting of high acquaintance ! In his sublime audacity, on the contrary, he asserts :

“ Part of the part am I, once all, in primal night,
Part of the darkness which brought forth the light—
The haughty light, which now disputes the space,
And claims of Mother Night her ancient place.”

Goethe was himself an Aristocrat, “ to the manner born ; ” this may indeed be the underlying reason why even his familiar, Mephistopheles, omits to say, “ *My friend*, the Lord ! ” Goethe had pondered much on the oldest book of the Bible, Job. Herder had written upon it, and a fine translation of his article can be

found in the fourth volume of "The Journal of Speculative Philosophy." Herder ploughed the ground in Goethe's mind for the growth of Mephistopheles, and the critic Merck served as Model for the completed thought. As painters in Rome, who, while knowing what they wish to portray, still search the Scala di Spagna for their models, so Goethe held his idea in reserve until he could fitly set it forth by partial imitation. Merck indicated Mephistopheles, but fell far short of the Artist's further development. Grimm justly says: "Mephistopheles grew far beyond the seeming intention of Goethe." And this may well be, since the author placed himself outside of himself, and dealt out the cards of his game of life to silent partners whose hands he knew, and who moved for or against, as he willed and prompted. As he himself grew wise to combine subtly, their moves reflected his plan and purpose. Mephistopheles grows, through companionship with Faust, into a gentleman-like diplomatist and statesman. He first presents himself, however, to Faust's consciousness as a servile poodle. The presence of this animal has been interpreted to represent, or typify, a finite means to finite ends, evoked by the thought of Faust to appropriate all avenues to creature enjoyment, to the comprehension of which the Earth Spirit had limited Faust's mental and spiritual power, finite enjoyment being typified by an animal because it has a limited activity, a kind of knowing without insight, yet is without language, which is the form of Spirit; the streaming trail of fire that followed the dog is compared to the evanescent glories that worldly honors, wealth, and sensual delights confer.¹ In fact, the very achievements that Faust has already pictured to himself and ardently desired, and for the reception of which his mind is already prepared. Wagner, to whom the creature reveals no unusual seeming, regards the beast with indifference, but Faust, recognizing blindly within himself a reason for its appearance, falls into profound meditation, typified possibly by an entry into his study, where in solitude his troubled soul enters into conflict with itself, and love of God and man struggle against the unseen Evil at his side. The inventors of the old Faust legend, who made the frisky animal an unfailing attendant on their fire and brimstone fiend, might indeed have

¹ "Letters on Faust," "Journal of Speculative Philosophy," vol. i, p. 186.

exclaimed in bewilderment as to the appropriation made by Goethe of their favorite familiar, and would find it a more difficult problem to swallow the philosophical demon than did Goethe's mother—who gave herself no concern about his Satanic Majesty. Mephistopheles in some of his phases is absolutely delightful in his fine irony—as, for example, when, having revealed himself as the poodle's real core, he, soundly sweating and panting, emerges from huge mist proportions behind the stove as Faust's semblance, a scholar! he has suffered so intolerably in the atmosphere of St. John's light of revelation, he finds himself so hopelessly entrapped and barricaded by the "Drudenfuss," and yet this queer Son of Chaos, at such an instant, gathers his forces and perpetrates a practical joke. Faust might well say, "the *casus* is diverting!" Mephistopheles observes soon after, in expressing his rage at Creative force:

"And had I not the flame reserved, why, really,
There's nothing special of my own to show!"

Here he writes impotent destructiveness upon his own brow, and ignorantly admits himself a tool of higher power. But our demon reveals the diplomatic courtier when he says:

"Culture, which smooth the whole world licks,
And also unto the Devil sticks,"

and goes on to teach Faust the valuable lesson—

"When with externals thou art well endowed,
All will around thee flock and flatter."

It is truly difficult to realize that so irrepressible a fiend as the Spirit of Negation should have no chance at all! In the compact between Faust and Mephistopheles each holds something in reserve. The devil is checkmated at the first move, although neither player in the game of life then sees it! But if the sole aim and triumph of the fiend is to prove the worthlessness of all things finite as fast as he presents them, is not he himself insuring the impossibility of Faust's exclaiming, with regard to things perishable: "Ah, still delay, thou art so fair!" Mephistopheles subtly proves that the laws by which sin enters the soul and those by which sin leaves it differ. It is easier for evil to find entrance than exit.

“For devils and for spectres there is Law;
The first is free to us, we’re governed by the second.”

Mephistopheles, in their varied wanderings, does not take his companion oftener than necessary to accomplish his evil purpose, to church; he pays the highest tribute to religion when he finds innocence (Margaret) at the door of the sanctuary, and even when he makes the sacred temple the theatre of his cruel scourgings of his trembling Victim with the lash of her own sins. He is ill at ease with Margaret. In the beginning he had “no power o’er souls so green.” And at the last he fears her, for her soul has never consented unto sin. She has no charm for him; her loveliness is not “la beauté du diable;” her simple goodness is witless in his eyes, but in her pure presence his gross speech is hushed; her happiness shall be Faust’s first selfish sacrifice in his onward career to earthly enjoyment and ambition. The foundation step to Faust’s ladder of fame shall be the crushed heart of the woman he loves, the only pure, true love of his life, the heart that never wronged him. But Mephistopheles blindly feels that Margaret’s influence will yet rob him of his prey. He may bar his victims from the priestly benediction, but there is no putting asunder for Eternity of those whom God hath joined; finite interest may obtain the priestly benediction, but there is no eternal joining of that which God hath put asunder! These are the thoughts that Goethe has shadowed forth in the relations of Mephistopheles, Faust, and Margaret. Goethe loved to appear incognito; so also Mephistopheles. Evil from the days of Adam approaches in borrowed guise. St. Paul exclaims: “The evil that I would not, that I do!” Mephistopheles reverses the case: “The good I would not, that I do;” he is the “wrath” that “praises God.” Starr King says: “The Faust tragedy, taken altogether, first and second parts, is the greatest miracle of literature. It is the serpent ‘Thought’ trying to swallow the world, and, it must be conceded, nearly succeeding in the attempt.” True, much baneful venom fell from the jaws of the insatiate serpent, which, if a necessary accompaniment of such monstrous deglutition, may yet be deplored. Goethe, however, sought only relief for himself, and, rightly considered, the book of Faust is not immoral. The divine endures, Mephistopheles is put to confusion, the deed

of the individual returns upon himself. Yet Goethe had no wish to moralize, he was simply working out his own problem of life. Neither his mental nor spiritual digestion was disturbed by other men's deductions; and if people seized despair when he rejected it, that was their affair, not his; he cannot be held responsible for that which he did not intend. And if, in exorcising his own devil of doubt, the latter entered the herd, his personal relief was what concerned himself, and the herd of swine (the lesser minds) and their fate were not considered. It was an old-time opinion that crime is most nearly allied to the uneducated classes, that the man of letters and science stands on a plane that lifts him above all sensual enslavement. Mephistopheles, therefore, is the type of the progressive and modern Satan, inasmuch as he knew all that lay within the realm of the understanding. The letter of Scripture he could quote and teach, and could talk of deity, although he could never think the Absolute. Like many an inferior creature, he was made the vehicle to carry and disseminate principles of life, although he did it as unwittingly as the black flies of whom Herodotus wonderingly writes. He handed the cocoon of sensual life to Faust, ignorant that through pain and remorse it would turn into the Psyche of undying and redeeming love. Goethe and Shakespeare have been called plagiarists by those who partially discover the process but cannot appreciate the re-creative activity. Such persons ignore the sculptor's thought, and demand the manual chisel labor; they are never satisfied. To be consistent, they should accuse language of plagiarism, reconstructed as it ever is from the souls of dead words. Nature is in this sense a plagiarist, utilizing forever herself for herself! Creative power is thus a plagiarist, evolving life from death in its eternal circle of destruction and renewal. Appropriation, participation, are in this sense plagiarism, and so only are the Authors of Mephistopheles and Iago "plagiarists." In the first part of the Faust tragedy we cannot lose sight of the Author; the individual (as well as his ideas) is embodied, and forces himself upon us. When, later, Goethe (so to speak) outgrows himself, the procession of his emancipated thoughts moves on in a grand triumphal march; his style becomes so true that the detail of muscle and sinew is not needed in order to define his meaning. The Mephistophelian serpent that was coiled about his life falls at his feet,

and we see him at the last emancipated, standing erect, bold, and strong as Apollo. He holds the terrible *Ægis* turned from himself, and towards the world; he is master of the deadly weapon; it no longer paralyzes him, and men must learn to gaze upon it and not die! *Mephistopheles*, not a flesh-broiling, flesh-eating ogre, is the devil men must face and conquer henceforth. The Zeus of Phidias was a type of the divine to the Greeks. St. Paul revealed "the Unknown God," but to the Saint himself the problem of the origin and office of Evil was as a deadly thorn and a body of death. It is the office of *Mephistopheles* partially to reveal to mankind the principle of Evil, the shadow of the Divine, the companion of Light, the eternally negated! That in which we may not abide, past which we are constrained to press, into which we must enter, through which we arrive at last, from the depth unto the everlasting height.

We are to deal with Faust's Spirit of Evil in this paper principally as he appears in the first book of the tragedy. It would be profitable if we could follow his marvellous outcome in part second of the play, but one point only can be alluded to—viz., the crowning crime prompted by the demon, and the last temptation of Faust, from the horror and remorse of which the latter falls into the clutches of relentless Care. The unpardonable sin against humanity is committed—oppression, cruelty to the Aged. The innocent youth of Margaret was the demon's first sacrifice, but the destruction of the home of Philemon and Baucis, and their consequent desolation and death, have left no meaner, darker deed to be enacted, and, as Faust's outward vision is closed by Nemesis from beholding the sin-bought prospect, the eyes of his spirit are turned inwardly to read the problem of life aright. For the last time he has uttered his awful casuistry, "the end justifies the means," the alienation is completed, the return is sure. In spite of the demon's utmost skill to prevent it, Faust's soul must bear the fruit of an unselfish endeavor, and, in uniting with the divine, evil passes out of sight.

From Magic, from the Mystics, Goethe drew inspiration and material, as did Thomas Aquinas and Emanuel Swedenborg. But with regard to *Mephistopheles*, Goethe seems to have borrowed much from Norse Mythology. *Mephistopheles* is Asa-Loke! Utgard-Loke, or hell-fiend, represents only lowest evil; but Asa-

Loke appears first in Asgard with the Gods. He assisted in the creation, giving the senses, passions, fire of the veins. In Nature he is the corrupting principle of the mighty four—Sylph, Undine, Salamander, Gnome. Like Odin (the divine), he pervades all.

Anderson says: "In no divinity is it more clear than this, that the idea, proceeding from the visible workings of Nature, enters into the human heart and mind, and there finds its moral and ethical reflection." In the beginning Asa-Loke was closely allied to Odin (Light), then united himself with Air, later becoming destructive fire, getting thus farther and farther away from the divine principle. Odin's union with mind and matter is creative and beneficent. Loke's is always destructive. In Nature, Loke brings about terrific throes and convulsions by land and sea. In man, he arouses all activities of lying; he is outwardly beautiful, but is of inconstant mind. Though of the Gods, he slanders and blasphemes them, and departs, Judas-like, from their midst, to work out his own destruction and their glory.

He is the ever-thwarting principle; he shortens the hammer of Thor, and bestows the ring of Andvari. Mephistopheles so closely resembles this old Norse demon that Goethe may have regarded and studied him with admiration, and taken him as Model.

Only a true philosophy—that which in itself includes, reconciles, and transcends all other systems—can solve the problem of Evil, and give to every man the power to eliminate its destructive element from his own being. Compared with this result of pure thinking, Science, which subjects steam to do her bidding and bridles and controls electricity, seems puerile. Philosophy, hand in hand with Religion, declares and defines to man the nature and limitation of Evil, and reveals to him how he shall erect a temple within his own soul before whose portal the monster serpent, Sin, shall lie prone in the dust, felled by the arrows of a light divine. A recognition of man's power of self-determination is the first stirring of the infant Hercules to conquer that which threatens true life. It is a promise and prophecy of strength that grows to giant proportions in the using, when man awakens from the cradle of purposeless inactivity. Into every human life comes the possible Eden, the possible Fall, the possible Victory. It is as man himself chooses, for in determining himself he destroys fate. No

need now to question "Who and what is Mephistopheles?" Philosophy and Religion have revealed him, and the means to his subjection. To lay hold on the divine-human as declared in the incarnate Word, to become self-determined, "to work out his own salvation" after this perfect plan and pattern, is man's heritage, his birthright. The appalling silence no longer endures when man is confronted with this problem of Evil, and when the Vala's awful question, "*Understand ye yet—or what?*" rings solemnly within his soul. For at length man overcomes the necessary thwartings, which only, as he negates them in his return from alienation less or greater, constitute him truly Man. And as he passes into the image of the Father, numbering himself with the children of Light, Evil has indeed become his good, for he has used it to his soul's discipline, and has conquered that mightiest of foes—himself! Himself, remaining Victor.

NOTES AND DISCUSSIONS.

A REPRINT OF "THE DIAL."

[We publish the following circular on account of its general interest to readers of Philosophy.—Ed.]

We propose to reproduce "The Dial," page for page, without abridgment, and with the addition of an index to the whole work, containing a list of the contributions, with names of the contributors, so far as it is possible to procure them; to which will be appended a full historical account of "The Dial," with anecdotes, incidents or gossip, that will in any manner illustrate the influence of a work which marks an era in American literature. The additional matter, pagéd separately, will be prepared by Rev. George Willis Cooke, author of "Ralph Waldo Emerson, his Life, Writings, and Philosophy."

For a long time it has been almost impossible to procure a complete copy of "The Dial," and the demand for it, coming largely from public libraries, has been so constant and growing that we feel warranted in issuing this proposal to reprint it, so soon as we can be assured of two hundred subscribers, at fifteen dollars each (to non-sub-